

Pieter Hondius
July 14, 2007
Location: Estes Park Museum

Betty Kilsdonk: This interview is taking place on July 14, 2007, in the Estes Park Museum as part of a series called Estes Park: A Study of Growth. My name is Betty Kilsdonk. Please state your full name.

Pieter Hondius: Pieter Hondius.

Betty Kilsdonk: I know that you were born in Denver in 1923, I think, and you lived in Estes Park seasonally as a child.

Pieter Hondius: Well, no, we were here permanently except in a good year we'd snow . . . the family snowbirded for about three months in the winter. Everyone that could, did, at that point. It wasn't much infrastructure to stick around with.

Betty Kilsdonk: So for most of the year you were here in Estes Park?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: What are your earliest memories of living in Estes Park?

Pieter Hondius: Well, really, it's hardly anything that involves what I think you might want. By age four, horses, I think, mainly. I still miss the horses. The place used to crawl with horses; marvelous. Probably more horses than people in here in the summer, almost.

Betty Kilsdonk: Right on the main street?

Pieter Hondius: All over. All the lodges had stables and there were several other independent stables and the place . . . it was a horse place, period. And before . . . the generation before that, that was transportation. For a lot of the summer visitors it was recreation, but not many people hiked and used . . . I know there were a few people out stumbling around on their feet, but it seems a regression, to me, that we are now doing that. You can sit on a horse and watch the scenery and the horse watches his feet and if you don't watch your feet you're going to break your neck, so you're not seeing the scenery. But that's personal prejudice.

Betty Kilsdonk: [Chuckles] When did that start to change?

Pieter Hondius: Well, I don't know whether it was just for me or for the place, but I put it down to World War II. The transportation was difficult, I guess; I understand gas was rationed, that was a problem. And the market that built

these lodges—and they all got built at about the same time—was the climate in the Midwest. When it got hot, they didn't have air conditioning, and if they could afford to, they sent the family out all summer and they stayed for the summer and the husband came out when he could. It was really solid business and the horse thing, again, they all rented horses. The places were kind of . . . sort of dude ranches without cows. And that's what everyone did all day, and if you didn't even ride your horse, you went down and visited him occasionally.

The inflation's interesting. The rate used to be \$1 an hour, \$2.50 a half-day, \$4 a day, \$7 a week, \$21 a month. That's a mantra I learned fairly early on when people asked me about it. And the horse was earning whether he was working or eating.

Betty Kilsdonk: What were the liveryies like downtown?

Pieter Hondius: Well, they . . . Don Kilton had one of the corner of . . . oh, boy. [Laughs] Ask Jim [Pickering]. Jim knows more about this place than I do—that's for sure. [Laughter] His was, I think, on the corner of Moraine and . . . not Moraine, the corner of Riverside. (I have trouble with street names around here; street numbers throw me completely.) And then [E.R.] Rivers was on down this direction a ways on the main street. And there was one up by the cliff at the west end of town that a fellow named Harry Legston [sp] ended up owning. And then, most of the others were connected with the lodges. Odie Whiteside had his down at the junction of the river and 36 and that was . . . most of the others were just spread around throughout the area.

Betty Kilsdonk: Were they places where people would congregate or what was it like to go to one of those places?

Pieter Hondius: Stables, you mean?

Betty Kilsdonk: Yeah.

Pieter Hondius: Well, typically, they . . . I don't know how it was . . . well, I sort of know how it was in the ones downtown. They would sign up for a horse and go down and get the horse or they would bring the horse to the lodge where they were staying and they'd—usually as a group, or individually, either way—go out for however long they wanted, with or without lunch. And that's when they'd get back to wherever they were staying and turn their horse loose and they'd hopefully tie the reins well around the saddle horn because if they didn't, the rein dropped and the horse stepped on it and it wrenched the horse and also tore up the bridle. But then, that's when the horse got back to the barn.

And most of them . . . it worked pretty well. Occasionally, they'd hit the wrong barn and you'd get someone else's horse. They all had distinctive brow bands on the bridle so you could tell, if they weren't branded, whose horse it was. And you'd swap them back and forth; you'd get yours back and get theirs from them. The better the horse was, the longer it took, usually, before you got rid of it.

Betty Kilsdonk: If you took an imaginary walk down Elkhorn Avenue, the Elkhorn Avenue of your childhood, what do you remember?

Pieter Hondius: [Chuckles] Well, it's funny, because the old people were moaning about how the place had completely gone to pot and there were still a few log cabins on the main street and we thought they were crazy. But now I begin to see it. The longer you live, I guess, the smarter they get, the old people. But it . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: So you mean, in your childhood they were saying things like that?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah. But I remember . . . I remember Church's [sp] sort of general store; they sold fireworks—that's what I remember mostly of it, cherry bombs and six-inch salutes, that sort of business. We got away with . . . we got away with what they let us get away with as kids. But we got away with more than they do today. [Laughs] A good time to be a kid, I think.

Anyway, that and the . . . Ralph Gwynn had just built the crazy tower on the theater; apparently, he had more money than he knew what to do with.

Betty Kilsdonk: Did you know him?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: What was he like?

Pieter Hondius: Well, he had a bottle problem, among other things, but he was otherwise a nice guy. And ran the movie, and the movie was a big thing then and otherwise . . . (I don't know how frank I want to be here).

But anyway . . . and then Brinkley's [sp] drug store was always a biggie; that's where the big soda fountain was and that's where the . . . next to the Wheel Bar, in that building. The building has changed; it used to have a dealie out over the sidewalk and someone took that off, apparently—improved it a little, I think. And then you've got the stables and car dealer and a couple of filling stations and that was about it. And a lot of curio stores, of course, that were selling birch bark canoes, at that point; it was a

hot thing. A souvenir "Estes Park" on it. I always wondered why people bought them, but they liked them, I guess. T-shirts are at least a little more utilitarian.

Betty Kilsdonk: I listened to an earlier interview that you had done with Lennie Bemiss back in 1979, and in that interview, you talked about going, as a child, to F. O. Stanley's home.

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: And you went to his workshop and he showed you a crossbow and he was making you a toy violin? Is there anything else you remember about the Stanleys and visiting them?

Pieter Hondius: Well [chuckles], I'm not going to have to tell it the same way every time; that's nice. Not really. I was probably six years old, something like that—maybe seven. And afternoon . . . Sunday afternoon with the old people was a wasted Sunday afternoon. I mean, no way around it—think what you could be doing out here instead. And not really.

Mrs. Stanley and my mother were very good . . . pretty good friends. And I remember her as a small lady who I guess was having a good deal of difficulty with eyes. And . . . I don't know if she was completely blind or what, but . . . no, I just remember him as sort of the big . . . with the beard, Santa Claus type, who obviously was highly respected in the community, as he should have been. And had a sense of humor.

Digging through the family pictures, I found one of him, apparently at a rodeo, sitting propped up against a tree with a lard bucket on his head for a crown and a couple of lights in each hand, apparently for headlights of a car. I don't think he . . . no one tied him to the tree, so obviously, he went along with the gag.

Betty Kilsdonk: What was his workshop like? What did it look like?

Pieter Hondius: Well, it was in the base- . . . lower part of that garage building that's still there, that separate building. It was just a . . . obviously, a very good workshop. I don't remember too much detail about it. I was fascinated with the crossbow; I'd never seen one, and . . . a remarkable instrument. I'm glad they don't use them anymore.

Betty Kilsdonk: Were they kind to you? Did you have a sense that they were . . . ?

Pieter Hondius: Oh, yeah, they were . . . sure. I mean, he took me away for an afternoon to get me out of their hair, I suppose—his wife and my mother's. And

entertained me. I'm very appreciative of it in hindsight. I should have gone for the violin; I could have sold it to Frank Normali. But I couldn't have played it.

Betty Kilsdonk: Maybe we should say that you were disappointed that he sent you a violin.

Pieter Hondius: I hoped . . . I'd heard that he was going to make something for me and that was . . . it was great; I thought I was going to get a little crossbow. And then on the grapevine, it turned out it was going to be a violin, and a toy violin, and a violin . . . what . . . violins are for sissies. Surely . . . it was a mistake, of course.

Betty Kilsdonk: [Chuckles] Let's talk about your grandparents. And I mean William and Eleanor James, the founders of the Elkhorn.

Pieter Hondius: Um-hum.

Betty Kilsdonk: Did you stay at the lodge as . . . when you were growing up?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah. I never knew them. I never knew my grand- . . . they were my grandparents. But, yeah, they . . . we had the house Bill Watson has now up the river across from the Elkhorn. And in the spring and fall, we were living there; in the summer, we'd be living down at the Elkhorn. And the . . . we usually had a unit in the old lodge—that first little strip building as you come in on the right—that was the original building.

And interesting . . . it was originally a real ranchhouse and you had to go from room to room out on the porch to get from room to room. And no one would . . . talk about ranchhouse now, no one would want to live that way. But the one I remember was the one on the corner, with a little bay window. When we moved back here, it had been leased to someone for a barber shop and had "Clip Joint" on it, which was interesting. But that's the first memory I have of a room anywhere was that room.

Betty Kilsdonk: What was life like for you out there, kind of in general? What kinds of things did you do at the lodge?

Pieter Hondius: Worked at the barn, rode horses, and entertained the guests' children. We had a thing . . . the lodge property then went on up Fall River to the ski jump and you'd . . . a couple of beaver dams in Fall River and you'd go up there with a horse and take the saddle off and swim him in the beaver dam, the lake, and that was good fun. The usual thing—cowboys and Indians; that sort of nonsense. If you stayed on bareback, you got to be an Indian; otherwise, you had to be a cowboy.

Betty Kilsdonk: Are there things . . . a lot has been written about your grandparents. Are there things about them that haven't been written that you could tell us things we don't know about them?

Pieter Hondius: Oh. Well, I didn't know them, really, that's the problem. So I'm not . . . let me think a bit. Well, all I really know is what I've heard from family and what was in that little book of my mother's. As far as I know, that's pretty straight. Apparently, my grandmother had a stroke, and went about ten years with it, and my mother spent a lot of time taking care of her. And then when she died, my mother spent pretty much full time working at the lodge and my uncle Howard, at that point, was running the place.

It's kind of an interesting thing—it was a family thing. When my grandfather died, my mother . . . grandmother headed it up but they had the two sons and they had the older son, Homer, back . . . who was a doctor, who was an unsuccessful doctor, as it turned out, back running the place. In the middle of August, the top of the season, he had a fight with the chef and fired him and the kitchen crew quit and that . . . they were still talking about that when I came along, ten years later. But that was all for him, as far as running the hotel went. And the next one took it over, Howard, and did it from there.

And one thing that I see that people are picking up on—it's just a very minor detail—but my father's business and the lodge were separate deals. He lived there in the summer and entertained the guests—he played bridge with them and things—but wouldn't give them any advice unless they asked for it, which I don't think they often did. It was . . . the Elkhorn, the James family, I don't think ever ran cattle any further up than probably the . . . (why am I blanking out here?) the power plant. That was . . . those hillsides were part of the property. We used to run horses on there, graze them, and Horseshoe and the area above the fish hatchery was my father's stuff.

Betty Kilsdonk: Let's talk about your dad for a minute. He came to the U.S. from Holland. What part of the Netherlands was he from?

Pieter Hondius: Well, he and his brother had a cigar factory in Middleburg, which is . . . I haven't seen the cigar factory, but I've been to Middleburg, and that's sort of midway up the coast. And I understand he was born in Arnhem; born in Vironenam [sp], a place called Vironenam, which is, I guess, near Arnhem, and that's about all I know of that.

But he had asthma and they were taking him to Switzerland for that and it wasn't helping him. They told him he could either go to Switzerland permanently or Western America, and he had . . . what he'd probably done

is read a bunch of dime novels about the West, and apparently he got to New York, bought a 4570 Winchester at Abercrombie and Fitch and climbed off the train in Denver in 1895, wondering where the Indians would be. And he went to Hahn's Peak out of Steamboat Springs with a mining deal for a while—about a year, I think. I think probably suddenly decided mining was no good and wound up here. It was, I guess, the winter, so they took him in at the Elkhorn and that's where he started out here.

Betty Kilsdonk: And that's how he met your mother?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: Do you know anything about how they met, any of the details of that? Did your mother ever tell you?

Pieter Hondius: Just that, and that . . . I assume then he decided to get organized, and bought the Hupp stuff up the Beaver and Horseshoe and built the house up there. By the time I came along, he'd gotten out of the cattle business and we were just cutting hay up there for the barn at the Elkhorn and so I don't know how long he lived up there or how much of the time he did. I know he had a winter pasture in Loveland and they used to drive the cattle back and forth over Pole Hill winter and summer, which must have been . . . fall and spring, which must have been a real bummer.

This area never should have been homesteaded; it should have been a natural area. It wasn't successful agriculturally and it's too bad. I understand from Mr. Pickering [chuckles] we can thank Dunraven for that. But you've got a resource here . . . I hope you . . . I know you appreciate him, but it's just unbelievable, what he's put into this thing. He knows more about this place than any other three people I've ever run into.

Betty Kilsdonk: So getting back to your father, when he died, you were still a boy?

Pieter Hondius: I was 11.

Betty Kilsdonk: And I know that your mother decided to name the Hondius Room, give the money for the Hondius Room at the library?

Pieter Hondius: Well, they didn't call it the Hondius Room then but it . . . she made a donation for . . . what they did was add a little reading room onto the little box that was the library then and it was . . . it improved. And of course, then they kept having to add stuff on there until finally they . . . it just got impossible and they had to put in the new one, which is very fortunate they did; it's working very well. They got involved . . . women got

involved with starting up the whole library thing, I guess. And I guess it grew from a couple of books in someone's living room to the old library that they had to replace.

Betty Kilsdonk: So they didn't call it "Hondius Room" at first, that came later?

Pieter Hondius: No, it was just a reading room.

Betty Kilsdonk: A reading room. Do you remember talking with your mother about that gift, making a gift to the library, at all?

Pieter Hondius: Well, she didn't consult me about it. She told me she was going to do it, but. . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: And in general, did she talk to you about what happened when your father died? And you were an only child; what life would be like without him and how you would cope?

Pieter Hondius: No, we didn't get into that too much. She was busy running the hotel then. When my uncle Howard died, she had to take over running it and she . . . she had a half-interest in it and my uncle's estate had the other half, but she was running the thing for . . . well, and took it through the Depression, which is where I decided I didn't want any part of it, which in retrospect I think was very fortunate. But after watching her . . . she was a somewhat nervous type, anyway, and watching her going through that thing was . . . I think it would have been a thing not to do halfway [happily?]. And my cousin . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: Why do you think she never remarried?

Pieter Hondius: I don't know. She never mentioned it; never suggested it. I don't have any idea.

Betty Kilsdonk: Your family was one of the wealthier ones, I think, in the area in that you had the opportunity to go away in the winter and do some traveling?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: And once you went around the world?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah, that was . . . boy, that was a mistake. [Chuckles] Well, it was a mistake for them; I was five years old, I think. They took me along and a lady who spent summers working at the lodge and taught in Connecticut in the winter, in a college, went . . . had a sabbatical, so she went along to help ride herd on me. And what I remember of that trip [chuckles] . . . at

five, you remember the traumas. I . . . we're in Paris, and I wet the bed. A bad deal, but it happened. I mentioned it and I was in the little bathroom off the room and the hotel staff appeared, they were waving their arms and gesticulating in French and the whole bit. Apparently, it was a big deal. They didn't sound too happy about it and it occurred to me, I was in the land of the guillotine and this could be a problem. And fortunately, my father came in and squared the beef.

Then we got into the pyramids and were crawling along the tunnels and got to . . . the fellow, the guide, was saying this was the king's room, and I was thinking, "Maybe we ought to get out of here, because if the king comes, he isn't going to like catching us here." And they said, "Silly little boy; the king's been dead 4,000 years." I knew they were lying because I'd seen the king of Egypt going through Cairo in an open car the day before with a bunch of guys on horses and swords around him.

Then we got in a typhoon in the Indian Ocean on a P&O packet and that was . . . we enjoyed it. The kids had a ball because the old people were all sick and we had the run of the ship. But that's the kind of thing I remember about that trip.

And one more. My mother had just gotten a movie camera she'd bought from Clatworthy and was really taken with it and was running it all over the place. And we got to Rome and I guess it had to be the Vatican, but the Swiss Guard was out there with his getup and his halberd and all and he didn't want her to take his picture. And he was waving that axe at her and she was doing it anyway and all I could think of was, "There's going to be a mess." Here I am, five years old, my mother was going to have her head cut off in a foreign country.

Anyway, that's . . . I think they'd have been happier if I hadn't been along. Those are the memories. . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: Did your father go with you on the trip as well?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah, uh-huh.

Betty Kilsdonk: So when you were growing up, as you mentioned before, that was during the Depression. . . .

Pieter Hondius: Well, the Depression hit when I was 12, something like that.

Betty Kilsdonk: And your father was dead and your mother was running the place. Do you have a sense of . . . Go ahead.

Pieter Hondius: Go ahead.

Betty Kilsdonk: ... of how the Depression impacted Estes Park?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah. We were lucky. The clientele we had were people who could maybe not afford three cars anymore, but they could still take that summer vacation and the climate in the Midwest was bad enough, and probably Texas, that it drove them out. So no one . . . business was off and earnings were considerably off and the sad thing was that the staff you had were all your friends and they were cutting their salaries to break the thing even. But no one, as far as I can see, starved up here, but no one really got rich here. The big years were the pre-Depression years, the '20s. That was when, I think, everyone was doing very, very well.

Betty Kilsdonk: Tell us something about your mother that we haven't heard before.

Pieter Hondius: I don't know what you haven't heard [laughs]. . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: Well, the library. You know, the famous story of her giving the money and all that kind of thing.

Pieter Hondius: Well, that one . . . Mel Busch came up with that one, I think. It's a good story. I didn't . . . [chuckles] I wasn't aware of it then. But one interesting thing was she knocked out that little book of hers. And we were encouraging her to do it to give her something to do, a retirement thing. She . . . of course, the ego press thing—she paid for the printing and had gotten a little second edition; she was making a little money out of it. That delighted her and we thought she maybe ought to write a sequel and she refused. And the idea that the people she would talk about's descendents would probably sue her for libel. These were [inaudible] I understand stopped, and wisely enough, there are people around who might wind up sniffing about things.

Betty Kilsdonk: What can you tell us about the Hondius pipeline up in Upper Beaver Meadows?

Pieter Hondius: Well, it's like a lot of things; it started innocently enough, I guess. When it appeared that the cattle business wasn't going to be the way to fame and fortune, my father started selling off cabin sites to people who wanted them on the lower end of the ranch, down toward park headquarters. Park headquarters was the last chunk the family wound up selling; it went to the government.

And they wanted water so he had a . . . it was a spring up Buck Creek, which is on the south side of Deer Mountain, that comes down that draw

where the Park . . . the road into the Park takes a swing to the south. That was a pretty good spring so he put a reservoir on that and a pipeline down the hill from it and started giving them water and selling them water. And one thing led to another and the thing grew to about 200 homes on it. And he kept adding capacity.

That's when he got into Beaver Creek up at the ranch and diverted that. There was a spring up there, there still is, with a springhouse on it. But he wound up diverting the creek to get more water and ran a line down to the distribution point where the Buck Creek line hit the road.

And they [chuckles] . . . it was a mess. You know, it was one of these things that you just add on to things like the hospital—they're finding that adding on to old buildings is no fun. And they . . . people would come up on Fourth of July and . . . the summer cabins and turn on the faucet to drain the line, get the rust out, and by noon they'd be out of water and the phone would start ringing. It was a mixed blessing. But one of those things are just sort of happen; grew like Topsy.

Betty Kilsdonk: I want to talk a bit about your family and your family's connection to Rocky Mountain National Park. You just talked about the Upper Beaver Meadows. Also, you supported the proposal to build a gateway, Rocky Mountain Gateway, a couple of years ago.

Pieter Hondius: A gateway?

Betty Kilsdonk: The Gateway area, the restaurant and the. . .

Pieter Hondius: Oh, yeah, this one down here; yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: And also I know you're involved in the land trust and you've been an advisor to the Forest Service, an advisory counsel. And also, you were involved in the conservation easement for MacGregor. Can you talk a little bit about your conservation ethic and what you see the relationship of the land and the environment to the people of Estes Park from your perspective?

Pieter Hondius: Well, you grow up here and the place gets under your skin. And the Park is the reason we've still got business here. If it weren't for that Park, this place would be a horrible mess. It's just be another beaten-up mountain area. And the thing that occurs to me is that we've lived off the scenery for over 100 years, and maybe if we take care of it, they can get another 100 out of it.

The land trust thing was easy enough because these things get started

when you've got a problem somewhere, and the problem, Lily Lake, when they had it subdivided for 120 houses around it, counting the guest houses on the place. And it was a dead duck; the town and Park had fought it and lost.

And finally-- Did you know Rex, by the way, Jim? Rex Baker? (Inaudible) Anyway, I hope . . . he got religion. Anyway, he decided he didn't want to do it, fortunately. But he and the Park weren't talking to each other anymore so they had us take the thing to the Park, but we decided we'd better start a land trust to . . . we didn't think we'd do any good with Lily Lake because it was too late but we might be ready for the next one.

And it was pretty simple; everything was right for it here. There were people that were interested in the place and emotionally involved and could afford to do the thing. You've got this fantastic retirement community here of talent running out its ears, and it wasn't much of a chore to get a board up and a couple of bankers on it and that sort of thing and some experienced people, and off it went. And it's nice we're getting cooperation with the first one was . . . the cooperation deal with the town and Gary Klaphake and Bernie Dannels wanted the thing and they put up—the town put up—\$40,000, the land trust raised \$10,000 at that point. We . . . I was sure we could do it but it went well and that was a good thing.

And ironically, they had their breakfast this morning down at Hermit Park and that was the first project we tried to do after we got organized. We didn't get anywhere, but they've been banging away on it for 20 years and happily, it's happened.

But it seemed to me it was important to . . . not only for the emotional involvement with the place but the hard-headed business involvement with the place—it's important that we maintain as much of the open space image and flavor as we can where it's available and reasonable. And that's, of course, how you define it, but if we let the thing go totally urbanized it's going to be very different and I think it's going to be very less attractive to the visitor.

Betty Kilsdonk: When you were born, the Rocky Mountain National Park was very young and now it's coming on 90-some years. How have people's ideas about Rocky changed in your lifetime and experience?

Pieter Hondius: Well, I think . . . I would say for the better because instead of it being the government telling everyone what to do, people appreciate what it's doing. And the so-called conservation ethic, if that's a reasonable phrase, has gotten to the point where it's considered respectable. I think if I'd heard

someone saying 40 years ago what I'm saying now, I'd have called the police. But as a real estate developer, I'm walking along with a foot in each bucket, which is okay.

But the Park we've seen mature into its . . . the big thing was in the '30s when they decided to expand it and bought my father out and a lot of other people and they were getting cash in the middle of the Depression; it was quite a windfall. And I'm a little . . . not surprised, but a little troubled, by hearing some grandchildren of some of those people moaning about how the government cheated their families because it's worth more now than they got out of it. That's foolish.

It's like this thing of . . . Udall's proposal to open the Park to hunting to manage the elk herd. It's another unfortunate stab at a use that just is not appropriate and happily, I don't think is going anywhere. But I'm sorry to see him do it.

Betty Kilsdonk: You left Estes Park for many years.

Pieter Hondius: Yeah.

Betty Kilsdonk: Do you want to talk about what you did when you . . . ?

Pieter Hondius: Well, I got out of the Navy and went back to school in Boulder and then went to Denver and I think I spent a summer up here subdividing up on Little Prospect. And went back to Denver and worked out of Denver for about 35 years in the real estate business and development, and fortunately got into the ski area stuff when it was getting going. And that was the best part of the . . . financially, the best part of the things I got into. But . . .

Betty Kilsdonk: Which ski area are you talking about?

Pieter Hondius: Well, we were . . . I was . . . I patrolled for 10 years at Arapaho and was involved in the Summit County stuff and Breckenridge. I got into that a bit. And very little into Vail, unfortunately. I remember we had an opportunity to option both ranches at either end of the valley for \$1 million and I was down on my knees in front of the boss's desk begging him to do it; it wouldn't happen. But that's one of those ifs. And some in Steamboat and some other development peripherally with it.

Betty Kilsdonk: Did you ever feel that the real estate business was at odds with your views on conservation or do you feel like your background complemented what you were trying to do up here as far as land?

Pieter Hondius: Well, I think I rationalized it to the point where . . . no, I still believe it—

that it's important to maintain not only the CO₂ problem and that sort of thing but for us, it's important to maintain the scenic quality where we can and try to be rational about it. Ski areas are recreation areas and I think it's appropriate that they're used the way they are.

And this thing of the wilderness deal, when the Wilderness Act got passed, that seemed an opportunity to get more of the Front Range area reserved because certainly the population was erupting here and the spillover would be big. And that's where we got into the Indian Peaks thing. And that went pretty well.

Betty Kilsdonk: Can you explain that a little bit?

Pieter Hondius: Well, they . . . the Park Service and Forest Service got appropriations about 1966, I think, to . . . fairly big appropriations from Congress to expand their recreation efforts and their amenities. And that's where the Park realigned the entranceways and got the Beaver entrance now and built a new headquarters.

And the Forest Service got its money and they went down to the Brainard Lake area in Indian Peaks and built a nice campground-trailhead facility and then they lost the money to maintain it. And the thing was getting . . . it was really getting bad. I mean, it was just getting abused all over the place. And a bunch of us decided we ought to try to see if we could get it in the wilderness system. And that was a colorful mess but finally it happened.

Betty Kilsdonk: Why did you come back to Estes Park to live?

Pieter Hondius: Well, my wife asked me one day, "Do you really want to move back or are you just talking about it?" And what can you . . . you're kind of stuck with it then—what can you say? [Chuckles] So we did. Well, I think I was getting retired and interested in the thing and met Lennie Bemiss, that's probably . . . Lennie is probably the one that did it; got me on the board of the Nature Association. And when they had a meeting, we'd come up for the weekend and Bob would take Helen out on the deck and show her the birds and this sort of thing. And just wanted to get out of the city, too.

Betty Kilsdonk: I wanted to go way back in time for a minute here and talk about Enos Mills. I know he worked at the Elkhorn when he was a young man, which was. . . .

Pieter Hondius: I understand . . . I never knew him. He had died before I came around.

Betty Kilsdonk: What I wondered is did your family have a relationship with his family?

Pieter Hondius: Yeah. [Laughs] Oh, boy. Yeah, they did, as a matter of fact. I remember as a kid hearing about him a lot. And this was, of course, when they were doing the fight on the transportation thing on the park. And most of the people I know, and I think most of the people in the community, considered Enos was getting to be a pain in the you-know-what. Anyway, that was that.

Then about 1940, Esther, his widow, had 40 acres up in Horseshoe Park west of the road and we had 40 acres my father had kept when he sold to the Park between the road and that. And she wanted access across it to develop it and my mother refused to give it to her and they had a lawsuit and it got fairly colorful. My mother won, apparently, if you win a lawsuit, so it didn't happen.

But I understand they're both in the Park now, which is good. They traded my mother out of it. She . . . how much time do you want to spend on this stuff?

Betty Kilsdonk: Go ahead.

Pieter Hondius: It was interesting. You were talking about Park people. They had a commissioner here who was sort of the unofficial judge in the Park who was named Wayne Hackett [sp], who was a real pain in the neck. I mean, he really was. He was [chuckles] . . . he would collar you on the street and brag about how he just arrested someone that the government was looking for years and on and on.

Anyway, he wanted to get . . . work on inholdings in the Park, which I now support working on. But he told her that he was going to get the Park to condemn it if she didn't get out of that 40 acres. It made her mad so she told him she wasn't going to do it and they just didn't care for each other at all.

And finally, after he died and it was obvious that it ought to be in the Park, part of the Park, and shouldn't be an inholding, but she'd gotten herself on a limb by swearing it would never happen. So the Park superintendent, whoever it was then, was bright enough to—it was Granny Lyles [sp]—bright enough to send some people who were buying Longs Peak Inn and wanted a chunk of Park property to buy it from her and trade that and get Horseshoe in the Park. And she knew what they were doing but it was a way of getting down out of the tree and she was content with it.

But that's . . . I've got to say that most of the people I've known in the Park I've certainly respected and I consider to be the pick of the

bureaucracy.

What I really appreciate is . . . one of them was the chief ranger then. When we were in high school up here we were talking about going to Aggies and taking forestry and going to work for the Park Service. He said, "You know, if you get anywhere, and are able to educate a family or something, you may wind up behind a desk and it may be in Omaha. I appreciated that advice.

Betty Kilsdonk: Can you tell us something about some of your family's other friends? And I'm thinking maybe J. E. MacDonald, Paula Steige's father.

Pieter Hondius: Grandfather.

Betty Kilsdonk: Grandfather.

Pieter Hondius: Her great-grandfather. I may have a little trouble with the generations anymore. They get away from you.

Betty Kilsdonk: Me, too. [Laughs]

Pieter Hondius: Yeah, he was . . . her mother . . . her grandmother and my mother were bosom buddies. They called him "Mr. Ed," Ed MacDonald, E. G. MacDonald or something. Yeah, that's . . . you want to hear about the rutabagas, do you?

Betty Kilsdonk: Sure.

Pieter Hondius: All right. Well, we'd go in there and my mother would say, "How are the vegetables today, Mr. Ed?" He'd say, "The rutabagas are very nice, Mrs. Hondius," and we'd leave with this huge sack of rutabagas. And God, I hate those things. But anyway, that was when you lived on root vegetables in the winter instead of frozen stuff.

And Sam Service, of course, was across the street. He was a marvelous character.

Betty Kilsdonk: Tell us about him.

Pieter Hondius: Well, he had the general store for years. What I remember about him was he spent about four summers at the . . . as the storekeeper at the lodge, the Elkhorn. And so I got to know him pretty well. And when we'd want to get something to eat out of the storeroom, why, we'd go around and see him and he'd usually give it to us. Sometimes he would, sometimes he wouldn't. And if we were going on a . . . to take someone out for an

overnight or something, we'd see what he'd give us to pack with it. It was usually beans, but . . . which is good, because you can't ruin beans.

Betty Kilsdonk: Who else do you remember?

Pieter Hondius: Let's see. [Chuckles] Well, I don't know how far you want to get into this, but there was a lady, a huge lady, physically, named Mrs. Seacore [sp] who had a great mop of white hair she had somehow kept up on top of her head, who ran a little antique store . . . street. And she . . . my mother was intrigued with antiques and Mrs. Seacore would call her and say she'd just gotten this marvelous find and she should come down and look at it. Half the time she'd buy it, and occasionally when she bought it she'd go down to Denver and look in the window of the department store and see a bunch of them in there. But she'd go back and get nailed by Mrs. Seacore again.

And what I remember was . . . the lady's husband was . . . I don't know what was wrong with him, but anyway, he sat in a chair all the time and smoked a pipe, couldn't get out of it—the chair, that is. And . . . I never saw him out of it. And he died and a guy in his 40s blew into town and Mrs. Seacore was 80 then, I think. And about six months later, he married her. And everyone said, "Ah hah—he's going after gold-digging." and "She married this gold-digger, the idiot." And two years later, the guy died; Mrs. Seacore went on. But anyway, I . . . it's too bad [chuckles] too bad the town didn't know Mrs. Seacore better.

Betty Kilsdonk: What are your dreams and your hopes for Estes Park?

Pieter Hondius: Well, it's interesting to me to see the evolution of the thing from a strictly tourist business to a presently retired residential community. I mean, it's 50-50 about now, I think, and of course they're knocking heads of who gets the goodies and all and arguing about tax benefits and this sort of thing and who's paying most of it.

But I think . . . I would hope, seeing it improve quality-wise . . . certainly we used to look at the main street and think, "What we need here is a fire," and instead we got the flood. And the sad thing was the fatalities in it but that was a real kick in the pants that at least got them to try to pick the thing up.

And the best thing that happened was the deciduous trees there that, in the summer, anyway, hide the facades since this thing was built over 100 years of people doing whatever they wanted to, why, it . . . I mean, it isn't pretty. You go up on top of the knoll and look down and it isn't pretty from there, either. But that's . . . from the ground, it looks pretty good now.

But I would hope it would continue to do that and be a thing of people who are—businesspeople—who are permanently involved with the thing, who plan on staying. It used to be people running in and out or someone coming up here and wanting to get into something and opening some kind of shop and not having it work and having to leave; it had very little permanence. But how the two will blend I don't know, but it's interesting watching the struggle between them.

I don't know; I would hope it would be a thing of continuing with the ecological awareness of, "We can't keep this up forever; we don't have the finite resource on the planet," and that we can settle down and do better. And I think that's probably an illusion, but things are improving some and that's about where I'd go with anything.

Betty Kilsdonk: What would you like to see happen to Rocky Mountain National Park?

Pieter Hondius: I'd like to see it stay the way it is and I would like to see it get tidied up. I'd certainly like to see it get wilderness protection because right now, it's exposed to the whims of very few individuals. When Ted James wanted to put the chair tow up to Hidden Valley, up to the drift, he went back to D.C. and the Park Service, local Park Service people, just didn't want it at all. He went back and got hold of Wayne Aspinall, who was the chairman of the House Interior Committee, the whole Interior Committee—had been it for about 30 years. And whatever he said, happened. He told him he wanted a permit for the tow and he called up Interior and said, "He's coming over, have it ready for him," and that's where they got that clear-cut up the hillside, which is not as bad as it might have been but it's going to be there for 20, 30 years. Another, I think, abuse of the resource. And since we're living in the resource, it seems to me to be foolish to let people beat it up.

Betty Kilsdonk: What would you like to see happen to the Elkhorn Lodge?

Pieter Hondius: I suppose I'd like to see it burn up except maybe the old lodge for sentiment. If I were condemned to fight the thing and someone gave me \$25 million, I would start over and leave the old lodge, the original part of the old lodge, for sentiment. And that two-story addition that my grandfather put on was obviously a mistake; it just doesn't function. Anyway . . . and I suppose it'd have to be condos and try to come up with some kind of center, activity center, in it. But we don't need any more condos around. I suppose a fire would be the thing.

Interestingly enough, I keep asking people, the historic register people, about what happens to a place that's destroyed by fire and you've taken

the tax benefit out of it by putting it on the register. Do you have to rebuild? If you rebuild anything, do you have to rebuild literally what's there or do you just let it go, or what? But no one's given me much of [what] I consider to be a satisfactory answer yet. I get a lot of funny looks. You don't want to talk about that too much because if a fire happens, you'd better prove you were somewhere else.

Speaking of which, I've got to put in a plug for the old fire truck—the old one, the 1923 White. It's the one they should have kept. That was a beautiful thing. It had a self-starter and that was pretty rare then. It also had a crank if you needed it. But it had a 500-gallon water tank that sat up way high on it and it got to the fire last. Going uphill, it just didn't have enough power to make it. The Cascade Lodge fire, the whole town was there and the CCC boys were there and the fire truck arrived. Cheers, and of course it was hamburgers then.

I got to drive it one day down through town—I was working in the garage up at the west end of town. We had up there; it was a reserve truck then and when the siren went, we were supposed to take it down to the firehouse. (My wife wants me to tell a story, so I'll tell a story.) There were about three of us working there and I always . . . never got to it first. And finally, I was there all by myself one day and I heard the siren and I jumped in the truck. It was the middle of August; headed down Main Street with the cars and the horses and all. I wasn't running the siren but the bell was clanging and everything and I was weaving in and out. And when I turned the corner down on Virginia, I guess it is, I almost rolled it with that tank up on top.

I got there and one of the deputy sheriffs was out in front of the firehouse saying, "Where is the fire?" And what had happened was they were running some congressmen up to look at the tunnel and they were running the sirens going through town and turned off of Moraine—purely innocent. And I was trying to save the town but what I got, of course, was ridicule.

But it's too bad they didn't keep that one because this Reo, you've got it out there now, it's no good; nothing much.

Betty Kilsdonk: Is there anything else you want to tell us that I have not asked you?

Pieter Hondius: No, no. [Chuckles] I think I more than . . . done more than I probably ought to.

Betty Kilsdonk: Thank you very much, Pieter.

Pieter Hondius: You bet.

Interview Ends